



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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‘Virtual Commissary’ opens for business

By Bonnie Powell

FORT LEE, Va. -- Commissary shoppers looking for a different kind of gift for friends or family at home or abroad can let their “fingers do the clicking” at the new Virtual Commissary. Located under the shopping link at <http://www.commissaries.com>, Virtual Commissary will open up a whole new world of Internet shopping for authorized users of the commissary benefit.

“We’re excited about DeCA’s first adventure into the world of Internet shopping,” said Patrick B. Nixon, chief executive officer and acting director for the Defense Commissary Agency.

Initially, one of DeCA’s business partners, Kraft Foods, Inc., is kicking off Internet shopping with a selection of gift baskets. “But the number of vendors and manufacturers participating will continue to increase – along with the variety of products,” Nixon said.

All of the products in the gift baskets at Virtual Commissary can be found on the shelves of “brick and mortar” commissaries, but the unique packaging of products into gift and special occasion baskets adds a new twist. With titles like “Camouflage,” “Drill Sergeant” and “Touch of Home,” the baskets offer assortments of crackers, canned cheeses, cookies, candies and even beverages and coffee packs.

To access the extended commissary, shoppers must pass through a secure portal found under the shopping link at <http://www.commissaries.com>. Personal information entered by the customer is validated to ensure they are an authorized shopper. Access is dependent on whether the customer is entered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Military exchanges use a similar method to check for authorization before permitting access to

exchange Web sites or online shopping.

DoD civilians stationed overseas who are otherwise authorized to shop at commissaries may not be able to access Virtual Commissary until changes are made to the DEERS database by the Defense Manpower Data Center, said DeCA officials. DMDC is targeting completion of the changes for late November.

Virtual Commissary customers can make selections and fill in their payment and shipping information in one easy and secure step, before being transferred to the manufacturer's site where they can get total cost for the product (including the shipping) and finalize their purchase.

Shipping and handling charges are paid by the customer, just as at most other Internet shopping sites, and charges will vary depending on the method of shipping selected, location, and the speed of delivery requested. Customers can check for availability of delivery to APO and FPO addresses as well as get more information on what's in the gift baskets by clicking on the image of the gift basket at Virtual Commissary. Payment for orders can be made with any credit card accepted in "real" commissaries and customer information is not archived by DeCA.

"We're certainly energized by the possibilities offered to our customers through this partnership with industry," Nixon said. "The future of online commissary shopping is unlimited!"

Down the road, Virtual Commissary expansion could include making a wide variety of commissary products available, a feature that would allow deployed military service members, retirees, and other authorized shoppers to order items they want and need at commissary savings – no matter where they live.

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The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$2,700 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.